

(Hawkins House)
Monroe House
South Shaftsbury, Vermont

HABS NO. VT-19

HABS
VT
2 SHAFTS,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Vermont

Historic American Buildings Survey
Arthur H. Smith, District Officer
Gryphon Bldg., Rutland, Vt.

VT.
2. SHAFES
1-

MONROE HOUSE
South Shaftsbury, Bennington County, Vermont

<u>Owner</u>	C. W. Hawkins, S. Shaftsbury, Vt.															
<u>Date of Erection</u>	Between 1798-1812															
<u>Architect</u>	Lavius Fillmore															
<u>Builder</u>	Unknown															
<u>Present Condition</u>	This house now owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Hawkins is being and has been kept in excellent condition.															
<u>Number of Stories</u>	Two															
<u>Materials of Construction</u>	<table><tbody><tr><td>Foundation</td><td>-</td><td>Stone</td></tr><tr><td>Floors</td><td>-</td><td>Wood</td></tr><tr><td>Exterior Walls</td><td>-</td><td>Clapboards</td></tr><tr><td>Interior Walls</td><td>-</td><td>Lath & Plaster</td></tr><tr><td>Roof</td><td>-</td><td>Slate</td></tr></tbody></table>	Foundation	-	Stone	Floors	-	Wood	Exterior Walls	-	Clapboards	Interior Walls	-	Lath & Plaster	Roof	-	Slate
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ADDITIONAL DATA

THE history of the Hawkins home is interesting and dates back considerably more than a century. Its architect was, without doubt Lavius Fillmore, who was a pupil of Bulfinch, and the architect who built the Middlebury and Old Bennington Congregational churches as well as many of the fine old homes throughout the southern ^{part of the state} his build-
~~ings, but he supervised their construction.~~

There is no record which fixes the exact date of the building of the Hawkins house, but there are account books in existence which were kept by Joshua Monroe who was the owner of the house and who ordered it built. The Monroe family were early settlers in Bennington county and the original farm contained much of what is now the town of Shaftsbury, although this vast grant has dwindled until the farm today contains about 300 acres.

Tradition has it that the house was seven years in building and the account books kept by Monroe from 1798 to 1812 contain many references to items which might well have gone into the construction of the immense house. There are amusing and tragic notes in the history of the old home, but the most tragic is the death of Joshua Monroe, who, embarrassed by bills, burdened with debts which he could not pay, and worried over the gradual slipping away of his ancestral acres, hanged himself to one of the timbers in his own barn.

While the exterior is beautiful and has served as a model for many homes of this type and its fine woodwork, doorways and windows have been repeatedly copied, the interior is no less interesting, one of the impressive features of the house is the immense hallway, lighted by the side lights and the lunette over the door. While this type of window is frequently found, these are, so far as is known, the only ones in Vermont where lead castings of an oramental nature were used to divide the panels of glass in the lunette. Lead garlands also decorate these panels, the lead as unweathered as the day the house was completed.

The staircase is most attractive with its ~~across~~ white treads and mahogany rail, but it is the upper room in which the architect used the arched and groined construction which marks the Middlebury Church. This room is lighted by a Trinity window which architects declare has perfect proportions.

The Monroe family must have been large or of a decidedly hospitable nature as there are 24 large rooms in the old structure. The huge "keeping rooms" on either side of the hallway are interesting for the wealth of work which the old cabinetmakers lavished in them, in the parlor, sacrosanct apartment of Colonial days, there is a friezeboard about the entire room at ceiling height, an English custom that is said to be found in no other home in Vermont. This is elaborately carved. The mantel over the fireplace, as well as all the woodwork in this room is highly ornamented, although the carving is in the best of taste and shows much of the Adam influence.

A feature of the old house is the large number of chimney cupboards where the housewife of that time displayed with no little pride her stores of pewter, china, glassware and rare silver. Some of these are two feet deep and the shelves are formed of one piece of pine board.

Here are found what are said to be the first marble mantels to be used in Vermont. While there is no record to show the source of this stone, it is presumed that it came from the Dorset quarries as the color and texture warrants such an assumption. The mantels are not polished and bear the marks of the cutting tools.

All of the fireplaces in the house have firebacks of soapstone, this

retaining and radiating the heat to a greater degree than the bricks in common use. Here again is found the first example of the use of this stone. The kitchen has a huge fireplace and brick oven where the family cooking and baking was formerly done. In the cellar, with its huge field stone walls and plastered ceilings, is a large kettle where the lady of the house held a semi-annual soap-boiling. From the huge beams of the ceiling hang hooks on which the meat supply was formerly hung.

Franklin is commonly credited with having invented the first stove. ^{was} This little more than a fireplace which extended into the room but which gave a greater degree of heat than the open fire. But Bennington claims credit for a still earlier stove, this an iron inset which fitted the fireplace opening and forced the flames and smoke toward the front of the opening, thereby giving out a greater degree of heat. The house has a number of these stoves, which are probably among the few products of the early Bennington or Woodford furnaces, now in existence.

One of the interesting features of the house is the guest room, a huge apartment with its colonial fittings. From this opened a smaller room in which the personal servant of the visitor was able to find accommodations, within easy calling distance of his master.

The doorway of the house when viewed from the exterior is perfectly proportioned with the slight double pillars on either side of the door this is surmounted by the lunette and a graceful Grecian canopy.

Extending the entire length of the house, just under the ^aeyes as a Frieze board with gracefully carved garlands. The corner boards of

the house are gracefully fluted and are surmounted with Grecian capitals, these carved from wood. While the exterior is ornate, when any particular section is closely viewed, the whole is in perfect harmony, with the gable lunettes adding the necessary touch of dignity and ornamentation to the end of the building. Set among huge maples and commanding a wide view of the Bershires and Taconics, it is a state showplace.

Approved

Arthur H. Smith
District Officer

WJ 7/26/37